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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABIDJAN 000831

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STATE FOR AF/W-EPLUMB AND INR/AA-BGRAVES

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SUBJECT: COTE D'IVOIRE LIGHTS FLAME OF PEACE

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES VICKI HUDDLESTON FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) A  
ND (D).

11. (C) Summary. The Government of Cote d'Ivoire held a July 30 "flame of peace" symbolic disarmament ceremony in the Forces Nouvelles stronghold of Bouake. While the ceremony was attended by 7 African heads of state or government, Ivorian opposition leaders Henri Konan Bedie, Alassane Ouattara and former Ivorian Prime Minister Charles Konan Banny did not attend. Alain Lobognon, Communications Director for the Prime Minister, told Emboffs August 2 that the ceremony, which demonstrated that Cote d'Ivoire is no longer a divided nation, was a response by Prime Minister Soro to President Gbagbo's request to visit the north. Lobognon said the next step is the resumption of the "audiences foraines" identification tribunals. Lobognon also stated that having Burkinabe troops come to Cote d'Ivoire was delayed because some in Burkina Faso mistakenly said they were coming to protect the Prime Minister rather than to assure the implementation of the Ouagadougou Political Accord (OPA). UN Operation in Cote d'Ivoire (UNOCI) Chief of the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Unit Jean-Luc Stalon told Poloff August 6 that the government must now take concrete steps to effect disarmament. Similarly, the spokesman for Bedie's party, (the Democratic Party of Cote d'Ivoire/Parti Democratique de Cote d'Ivoire - PDCI) Djedje Mady, told Poloffs August 3 that, while the declarations made at the ceremony stating that the war is over are positive, the government must take concrete steps to demonstrate that peace has returned. Mady was also critical of the international community for eliminating the position of UN High Representative for Elections. End Summary.

12. (SBU) The Government of Cote d'Ivoire held a "flame of peace" symbolic disarmament ceremony July 30 in the Forces Nouvelles (FN) stronghold of Bouake. The ceremony, at which a token pile of weapons were burned, was attended by the Presidents of Burkina Faso, South Africa, Mali, Togo, Benin, and Guinea-Bissau and the Prime Minister of Niger. However, it was not attended by Ivorian opposition leaders Henri Konan Bedie (Democratic Party of Cote d'Ivoire/Parti Democratique de Cote d'Ivoire -- PDCI) and Alassane Uttara (Republican Alliance/Rassemblement des Republicains -- RDR), and former Prime Minister Charles Konan Banny. The South African and Indian Ambassadors told Poloffs at an August 1 diplomatic reception that the stadium in Bouake was filled to capacity with about 20,000 persons and that several thousands followed the ceremony from outside the stadium. President Laurent Gbagbo, in remarks during the ceremony, proclaimed that war is ended and peace has arrived in Cote d'Ivoire. Gbagbo praised Prime Minister Guillaume Soro for being willing to engage with him in the dialogue that led to the OPA and said that preparations to hold elections would immediately begin. Prime Minister Soro, in his speech, described Bouake as a "capital of peace" and told Gbagbo that Gbagbo bears the

heavy responsibility of turning the peace that was being celebrated at Bouake into a lasting and true peace. Soro said the peace process is irreversible and Cote d'Ivoire is once again united, and encouraged internally displaced persons (IDPs) to return to their homes.

13. (C) The Communications Director at the Prime Minister's Office, Alain Lobognon, told Emboffs August 2 that organizing the ceremony was a "challenge" for Soro and said it was the result of President's Gbagbo request to visit the north. According to Lobognon, the ceremony demonstrated that Cote d'Ivoire is no longer a divided country. He said the next step is to implement the OPA by restarting the "audiences foraines" identification tribunals in August. Lobognon said the issue of nomination of sub-Prefects is under discussion. Lobognon expressed regret that Bedie and Ouattara did not attend the ceremony, although they were invited, and noted that the decision to hold the ceremony was made at the council of leaders set up by the OPA, at which all political parties are represented. Lobognon said the scheduling of the ceremony accelerated the issue of having Burkinabe troops come to Cote d'Ivoire. Lobognon asserted that the OPA calls for Burkinabe troops to come to Cote d'Ivoire to ensure that the peace process moves forward. Lobognon told Poloffs that some officials in Burkina Faso stated publicly that 150 paratroopers were coming to protect the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister saw this as an affront to Cote d'Ivoire's capacity to protect its Prime Minister and decided to ask Burkina Faso President Blaise Compaore to postpone their arrival. According to Lobognon, Burkinabe troops may come to Cote d'Ivoire, although a date has not yet been established and must be decided on by the Government of Burkina Faso.

14. (C) Chief of UNOCI Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Unit Jean-Luc Stalon told Poloff August 6 that

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the ceremony was significant because it marked President Gbagbo's return to the north and demonstrated that Soro is in charge of the FN and that the FN will implement the OPA. Stalon noted that the ceremony was symbolic and not an exercise in disarmament. According to Lobognon, while some in Prime Minister Soro's entourage have made statements indicating that the ceremony may mark the end of the disarmament process, that is not Soro's position. Lobognon said that during the ceremony, the weapons to be burned were placed in a container doused with a flammable liquid. He said that when the container was lighted, there was a small explosion and the VIPs attending the ceremony quickly moved away. Stalon said that, in a very symbolic action, President Gbagbo took hold of Prime Minister Soro's hand and they moved away from the fire together. Stalon said the next step is for the government to take concrete steps to effect disarmament.

15. (C) PDCI Secretary-general Alphonse Djedje Mady told Emboffs August 3 that the declarations made at Bouake that the war has ended are positive, but that concrete results showing that the conflict is over are lacking. Mady said reunification of the armed forces has not yet occurred and militias are still armed. He noted that prefects and judges have not yet assumed their duties in the north and said that one administrative system to run the country must be put in place if the country is truly to be united. Mady said PDCI leader Bedie did not attend the ceremony because he only received an invitation the Friday before the Monday ceremony, which he interpreted to mean that he was not really wanted. Mady, who headed the PDCI delegation to the ceremony, stated that opposition political party representatives were relegated to back seats. Mady stated that only the government can take the actions needed to effectively bring about peace, adding that the President decides everything. Mady said it is important to encourage all small gains on the path to peace and said he believes the holding of elections in 6 or 7 months will be difficult, but possible, if the political will exists. Mady was extremely critical of the

international community for eliminating the position of High Representative for Elections. Mady said that the government bodies that will certify the elections, the Supreme Court and the Constitutional Council, are controlled by Gbagbo and accused the international community of doing what Gbagbo wants since there is currently no violence in Cote d'Ivoire.

HUDDLESTON